



LEFT: Musical Director Ossie Cheesman (l) and producer Ian Watkins discuss the script by Jim Weale (back) for the ZB Christmas Night Nigger Minstrel Show. At right is Malcolm Howard, who supervises the presentation of the show

"Rastus, ken vew tell me whay ah chicken cros' de road?" Sambo's secret of success is to let the audience know he's cracked this joke a hundred times before and that it bores him as much as it bores them.

"This is one of the hardest things to bring off in putting the show across," says Ian Watkins. And it has been the reason for some intensive rehearsal among the troupe over the last two months. "The character in the voices must be complete, otherwise we will sound just like hams trying to imitate nigger minstrels."

If the rest of the company can put the dialect across as well as the producer, the show should be a thundering success. When Mr. Interlockiter can get a word in edgewise he'll ask for songs from tenors Ramon Opie and Reginald Spence, baritones Graham Godbeer, Tony Rex and Jim Hoskins, and bass Ian Morton. The soloists will be accompanied on banjo, tambourine and drums, and occasionally backed up with a chorus, and the strings and woodwinds of the Auckland Studio Players, conducted by Oswald Cheesman. Ossie has arranged the music—all traditional nigger minstrel songs like "Camptown Races," "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair," "Ring, Ring the Banjo," "Swanee River," "Waitin' for the Robert E. Lee," "Uncle Ned," "Deep River," "Old Black Joe," "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," and so on.

"It would be pretentious to write big arrangements for a nigger minstrel show," says Ossie Cheesman. "The orchestra will keep pretty much in the background."

With gentle harmony in the background and plenty of rumbustious mirth and melody to the fore, the Nigger Minstrel Show should prove a winner. It goes on the air over the main Commercial stations at 8.30 on Christmas Night.

Ring, Ring de Banjo

"HOW will we go about it? ... what will we do? ... Yassir man, tha's a verry pertinic'lar quairstion."

It's a "pertinic'lar" question that comes up once a year, when the time comes to decide what form the Commercial stations' Christmas Night radio programme will take. For several years, the ZBs have offered their listeners a special light show on this very special night when families and friends are together.

In the past, it has taken the form of a revue—the first year it was the pantomime *Dick Whittington*; next, a variety programme *You're Welcome*; and last year *What's Your Pleasure*, featuring Maori numbers specially chosen for the Royal visit.

This year, the Auckland team who put the show together wanted to break away from the usual pattern. Station manager at 12B, John Griffiths, and chief announcer Ian Watkins got together on the pertinic'lar question, and clicked on the idea of a real old-time nigger minstrel show. John Griffiths had seen numbers of them in Australia, where three radio stations run them as a regular feature which draws listeners and studio audiences from all over the Commonwealth. And Ian Watkins has himself played in nigger minstrel shows in this country.

"I'm sure very few of the young people in New Zealand have ever seen a nigger minstrel show," says John Griffiths, "but up until 25 years ago they were very popular."

"The Niggers" flourished for about 60 years, and appear to have started out in popularity when the American Thomas Rice sang a song called "Jim Crow" in Pittsburgh in 1830. About 15 years later, a troupe called the Virginian Minstrels wowed 'em in the hinterland with a song by Dan Emmett called "Dixie."

Minstrels became rapidly popular. The performers were white men with blacked faces, singing "what purported to be Negro songs" (as one chronicler puts it), imitating the Negro speech, cracking Negro jokes, playing the banjo

and the bones, dancing, and so on. Among the most famous of the many composers who wrote for the minstrels was Stephen Foster, whose songs were introduced to the public by Christy through his famous "Christy's Minstrels."

Many of the songs from the old-time shows will be presented in the Christmas Night programme.

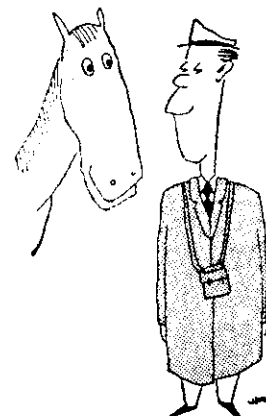
"The show will follow the traditional pattern," says its producer, Ian Watkins. "The compere, always Mr. Interlockiter (Athol Coats), introduces the company. He is harassed by the two endmen, Rastus (Peter Gwynne) and Sambo (Jim Weale). They crack corny old jokes which always get a horse laugh from the company, who sit around in the background spitting watermelon pips and making life miserable for Mr. Interlockiter with their wayward behaviour."

And so the show rolls along its rollicking, drawing, non-stop way.



"LIKE A BITE?" A party of Maori, Chinese and Indian youngsters from an Auckland school happens in on a rehearsal of the ZB Nigger Minstrel Show at 12B

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